

Foundations of Expression

Studies and Problems for Developing the
Voice, Body, and Mind in

Reading and Speaking

By

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A WORD ON THE POINT OF VIEW

The Muse of Eloquence and the Muse of Liberty, it has been said, are twin sisters. A free people must be a race of speakers. The perversion or neglect of oratory has always been accompanied by the degradation of freedom.

The importance of speaking to a true national life, and to the forwarding of all reforms, can hardly be overestimated; but it is no less necessary to the development of the individual. Expression is the manifestation of life, and speaking in some form is vitally necessary for the assimilation of truth and the awakening to a consciousness of personal power.

Since the invention of printing, the written word has been overestimated in education, and living speech has been greatly neglected. Recent discoveries of the necessity of developing the motor centres have revived interest in the living voice.

With this revival of interest the inadequacy of modern elocutionary methods has come to be realized. Such methods have been based usually upon imitation and artificial or mechanical analysis, and consist of mere rules founded upon phraseology, the modulations of the voice being governed by rules of grammar or rhetoric instead of by the laws of thought. Neither the nature nor functions of the voice modulations have been recognized. An able college graduate, and head of an educational institution, once acknowledged to me that he had never thought of a voice modulation as having a distinct meaning of its own with power to change even the meaning of a phrase.

This book outlines the results of some earnest endeavors to study anew the problem of developing the voice and body and improving reading and speaking. The attempt has been made to find psychological causes, not only of

the expressive modulations of the voice, but of the conditions of mind and body required for its right training and correct use.

The usual view is that every defect in the use of the voice is associated with some local constriction, and that for every abnormal habit or action some exercise to restore the specific part can always be found. While this is true, it is but a half truth. Every abnormal action or condition has its cause in the mind. Hence technical training must always be united with work for the removal of the causes of faults, and for the awakening of the primary actions and conditions. This enables the student to become himself conscious of right modes of expression, develops him without imitation or mechanical rules, and produces no artificial results. Even when the right technical exercise is prescribed for a fault in reading or speaking it is often ineffective on account of wrong or mechanical practice on the part of the student, or a lack of attention on the part of teacher or student to the real psychological causes of the abnormal conditions.

In seeking for such exercises as are safe for classes, for private study, or where specific technical exercises cannot be given individually by a teacher, and such as require primary mental action or at least apply practically and naturally the results of technical training, what are here called problems have been found most helpful. Technical exercises, to accomplish any good result, must be carefully prescribed by the teacher and practised under his direction so that the exact part may be made to act in just the right way. In large classes and with young students this is well-nigh impossible.

These exercises stimulate the primary mental actions, cause the normal response of voice, and furnish an introduction or practical addition to technical exercises; they prevent artificial results, stimulate normal growth, are more interesting, cause more complete self study, and are safer for practice alone. To accomplish these ends, what are called in this book problems have been found most helpful. One who will systematically practise these inductive studies will be led step by step to the right use of

his voice, and to a conscious command of its expressive modulations.

Such practice has its difficulties. It requires care, perseverance, self study, a harmonious use of thinking and feeling, insight into what is fundamental rather than accidental, exercise of the imagination to hold a situation, and of the sympathetic instinct to yield breathing, voice, and body to its dominion.

Students and teachers, especially those who have been accustomed to mechanical or imitative methods, will at first consider such a method impractical. But patient, persevering practice for a few lessons will be followed by such an awakening of interest, such a realization of the true nature of expression, and such satisfactory results, that there is little danger of a return to artificial methods. Such training with careful study of himself on the part of the student, especially if directed by a true teacher possessing insight, will accomplish surprising results.

The student should regard no problem as trivial, but should practise it faithfully and the lesson will solve for him difficulties not seen at the time.

Teachers will of course, according to the earnestness of students and opportunities for practice, add technical exercises at certain points complementary to these problems. For information regarding additional exercises or explanation, the author's other works should be consulted. For example: "The Province of Expression," "Lessons in Vocal Expression," "Imagination and Dramatic Instinct," "Vocal and Literary Interpretation of the Bible."

The student is urged not to accept passively the superficial views of delivery so prevalent at the present time, but to study himself anew, to take the problems in their order and work upon them with a receptive and teachable spirit until he masters this most difficult but most important phase of education.

S. S. C.

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FOUNDATIONS OF EXPRESSION

I

UNPRINTED ELEMENTS OF EXPRESSION.

Read the following lines in two ways, — first, as an abstract statement of fact; and secondly, 1 suggesting as much depth of meaning as possible, and note the chief differences in the renderings.

Two prisoners looked out from behind their bars;
One saw the mud, — the other saw the stars.

In the first rendering the words follow each other almost continuously; in the second, there are many pauses, variations, and modulations of the voice. While the words remain the same the impressions caused by the two renderings are very different, and the elements which cause this difference cannot be clearly defined.

These unprintable elements constitute delivery. They are distinct from words and have a meaning of their own, for though all the modulations of the voice are directly associated with words they express that which words cannot say.

I. MODES OF EXPRESSION. All natural conversation consists of three elements: — words, modulations of tone, and action. Words represent ideas and name objects of attention, events, or qualities. Modulations of tone while simultaneous with words have a meaning distinct from words and can be changed without changing pronunciation. They reveal degrees of conviction, processes of thinking, attitudes of mind and feeling. Actions, such as the expansion of the body, changes of

countenance, and motions of the hand or head, express character, purpose, degrees of excitement, and self-control. While distinct from each other, these words, tones, and actions co-operate and act simultaneously; as each reveals something which cannot be expressed by the others, they complement each other, and when sympathetically and naturally co-ordinated, thought is expressed with far greater clearness and force than is possible otherwise.

It is the problem of delivery to develop each of these elements of expression according to its distinct nature and function, and to bring them all into harmonious co-operation.

2. THE NATURE OF EXPRESSION. As the leaf manifests the life at the root of the tree; as the bobolink's song is the outflow of a full heart; so all expression obeys the same law; it comes FROM WITHIN OUTWARD, from the centre to the surface, from a hidden source to outward manifestation. However deep may be the life, it reveals itself outwardly by natural signs.

Expression in man is governed by the same law. Every action of face or hand, every modulation of voice, is simply an outward effect of an inward condition. Any motion or tone that is otherwise is not expression.

A machine is manipulated from without, but an organism is modulated from within. Man can, on the one hand, produce by his will certain actions of body and inflexions of voice; he can, for example, imitate the action or speech of another, or obey mere mechanical directions; but, on the other hand, he can obey the spontaneous energies of his being. The results of the first process are artificial and mechanical; the results of the second, a genuine awakening of man's powers, with true force and naturalness of expression.

One of the first steps in the development of expression

must be a recognition of the necessity of genuine possession. IMPRESSION must precede and determine all EXPRESSION, and it will be noted that the tendency toward expression is directly proportionate to this inner fullness, while mere surface work causes superficiality.

Observe this spontaneous tendency of realization to determine expression, by reading two short passages widely contrasted. If superficially apprehended, or the mere words be given, they will appear 2 practically the same, but in proportion to the genuine realization of the thought and feeling will the modulations of the voice differ.

Merrily, merrily, shall I live now,
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.
Ariel in "The Tempest." SHAKESPEARE.

Though love repine and reason chafe, —
I heard a voice without reply, —
'Tis man's perdition to be safe,
When for the truth he ought to die.

EMERSON.

3. THE MENTAL CAUSE OF EXPRESSION. The unprinted and unprintable modulations of voice and body are so natural and necessary to the simplest sentence in conversation, that, one would naturally think, their nature and function would be recognized by everyone; but as a matter of fact, the subject of delivery is universally misunderstood and neglected. The simplest modulations of the voice, as well as the primary actions of the body, are hardly recognized or their functions distinguished. Expression is employed blindly and is rarely considered a proper subject of education. So superficial is the conception of the elements of delivery that they are universally regarded as mere matters of manner, and the methods adopted for their development are often founded upon imitation or mechanical rules.

All true expression is not only from within outward

but from the mind. Modulations of voice and body are directly responsive to the deepest life.

That expression is a mental and not a physical thing is shown by the fact that all true expression is more or less spontaneous and subconscious. Its elements cannot all be reduced to rule. At the best rules can be applied only to a very few of the more accidental and external elements. Expression is infinitely complex, and to start with the idea that delivery belongs to the body and can be regulated by rules or conscious directions is sure to produce superficial results.

To realize that the nature of expression is the direct effect of mental action, read a line or a short passage first listlessly or with indifference and then with 3 intense earnestness, and it will be seen that the expression is natural and forcible in direct proportion to the clearness, force, and variation of the thinking.

Long sleeps the summer in the seed.

"In Memoriam."

TENNYSON.

A BOOK.

He ate and drank the precious words,
His spirit grew robust;
He knew no more that he was poor,
Nor that his frame was dust.
He danced along the dingy days;
And this bequest of wings
Was but a book. What liberty
A loosen'd spirit brings!

EMILY DICKINSON.

If some passage with an extreme transition be truly rendered, at the very point of the change in situation, thought, or feeling will come changes in the 4 modulations of the voice.

If the changes of expression do not occur, observe first, whether the situation and ideas were truly felt; second, whether the organs of the voice were normally used; and third, whether there was a true conception of

the nature and function of the modulations necessary to the expression.

"By the God that made thee, Randolph, tell us what mischance has come";

Then he lifts the riven banner, and the asker's voice is dumb.

"Battle of Flodden Field."

AYTOUN.

A little thought will show that language is always a means, and that in the natural languages the modulations of tone and action directly reveal the processes of the mind. Expression is perfect in proportion to the directness of its revelation of mental energy. Too much attention to the mere externals of expression, a study of modulation or action without observing and securing control of the mental cause, will render all work in delivery inadequate and mechanical.

4. ORGANIC MEANS OF EXPRESSION. Notwithstanding the natural tendencies of right mental and emotional action to cause true changes in expression, in many cases even an extreme change of thought or emotion does not in reading and speaking cause a change in the voice.

Why? Because the voice has become constricted from misuse, habits of indifference in reading, a mechanical view of speaking, a neutral, negative attitude of mind, or a lack of sympathy has perverted the natural responsiveness of the vocal organs.

Hence, not only must the cause of expression be awakened; the right means must also be secured. Vocal expression is the modulation of living organs. These must be flexible and used naturally.

Work for the attuning of the organism is vitally necessary and must go hand in hand with the development of the right use of the modulations of the voice and all work for expression.

The development of normal conditions and possibil-

ities of the organism is called training. Nature's own functions, methods, and processes must be studied to find the basis for development. Training implies exercises, or the accentuation of natural and fundamental actions which must be so practised as to correct bad habits, and develop the normal and best conditions of the organism. Exercise may be technical, or the direct volitional practice of a fundamental action; and psychic, or the specific practice of that mental action which tends to cause the right expressive action, or to establish conditions for such action.

Both of these means of training are necessary, but in this work psychic exercises, here called problems, are chiefly used because they are safer for the use of the student alone or in class. Technical exercises, however, can be introduced from the author's other works by the teacher when the class is small and the students sufficiently earnest to be willing to practise alone, carefully and regularly. Psychic exercises also demand practice, but practice upon these is more interesting and less liable to be perverted by the student on account of the fact that it primarily calls for mental effort. The psychic exercise is also more synthetic; the technical exercise more analytic. The psychic exercise calls for earnestness and observation; the technical exercise demands great precision and care.

5. FUNDAMENTALS AND ACCIDENTALS. The development of expression implies necessarily an inner awakening, a stimulation of faculties and powers, a securing of a deeper impression, and more vital realization of truth.

Accordingly, the problem of improving expression is not only important for its own sake, but modulations of voice and actions of the body are so directly connected with activities of being that to become conscious of the

function of any elemental modulation and to develop its power requires the awakening of the whole nature. True work in expression must necessarily be associated with a discovery of one's self.

For the same reason the problem of developing delivery is difficult. Some even doubt the possibility of its development. How can the spontaneous actions of the mind, for example, be stimulated? How can complex modulations of the voice and actions of the whole body be awakened and brought into anything like unity, especially if we are to discard mechanical rules and imitation?

The general characteristic of a true method of developing expression needs careful attention. Throughout all nature we find an infinite variety of phenomena. Expression necessarily implies infinite complexity, but in the midst of seemingly the most confused mass of elements we find a principle upon which all else rests. For example, if we examine the numberless shades and tints of color we find only three that are primary. Chemistry has proven that there are but few elements which form the basis of material objects.

Similarly, in all the complex modulations of the voice and actions of the body we can find a few primary elements upon which all the varied results are founded. By finding and developing these, and bringing them into conscious recognition, the key to natural expression is found. When we recognize these fundamentals develop them normally and realize their function the mind is enthroned. All the subconscious involuntary, and even accidental elements, will respond in natural fulness from the accentuation of those primary elements upon which all the modulations rest.

Work upon fundamentals does not produce self-consciousness, in fact such work corrects it. Self-consciousness results from a perversion of nature, from

focussing attention upon accidentals, and not upon fundamentals; from abnormal constrictions, and some kind of hindrance.

The removal of self-consciousness implies development of elemental conditions. "Work upon accidentals secures mediocre results; work upon fundamentals develops power." There are innumerable illustrations of this principle. To work upon mere accidents of phrasing, to lay down rules where to pause, will superficialize all expression. On the contrary, expression will be made natural and forcible by developing the rhythm of thinking, by securing the power to conceive vivid ideas and impressions, and by awakening that instinctive action of the mind in which vivid, clear ideas gather words into groups, which is the characteristic of naturalness in conversation.

It will be found in every step of training, in all true work in expression, no matter under what phase of it, that the principle holds good. First, find the fundamentals; make these normal, and expression can then be naturally improved. There will be no perversions, no artificialities, no affectation, but all will be normal, dignified, and strong.

To realize the general nature of delivery, take some short passage or fable and, after careful study, 5 render it as naturally as in conversation, noting the while the fundamental actions of the mind in thinking and the primary modulations of the voice.

Skies may be dark with storm
While fierce the north wind blows,
Yet earth at heart is warm
And the snow drift hides the rose.

CELIA THAXTER.

A hungry Fox one day saw some fine grapes hanging high up from the ground. He made many attempts to reach them, but all in vain. Tired out with his failures, he walked off, grumbling to himself, "Sour things, I am sure you are not fit for a gentleman's eating."

Or give some poem as simply and adequately as possible, endeavoring to think it and to express it in such a way as to make another realize its force. 6 Then note that every modulation of the voice is directly associated with some primary action of the mind.

THE BROOKLET.

The brooklet came from the mountain,
As sang the bard of old,
Running with feet of silver
Over the sands of gold.

Far away in the briny ocean
There rolled a turbulent wave,
Now singing along the sea-beach,
Now howling along the cave.

And the brooklet has found the billow,
Though they flowed so far apart,
And has filled with its freshness and sweetness
That turbulent, bitter heart.

LONGFELLOW.

The student should first observe the general differences. For example, in the preceding poem, "Brooklet" is made the center of the first stanza in the thinking, and the voice gives this word a corresponding degree of importance. The thought of the second stanza is made to gather around "wave," and peculiar changes in the voice show that the mind receives a different impression from that in the preceding. In the last stanza there is a still wider difference of feeling.

Tell a short story in your own words, or state a simple thought in a sentence and note the actions of both mind and voice necessary to make it clear and interesting to another. 7

EXPRESSION is the manifestation of mental activity; the outward sign of life and spirit.

DELIVERY is the expression of the human being through the human organism. It results from the



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